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ABSTRACT

The data collected by the Ways to Improve Education in Desegregated Schools (WIEDS) survey and summarized in this paper include the following: (1) demographic data of school districts in Texas and educators surveyed; (2) successful desegregation strategies used by the 262 sample school districts, particularly those used for racial balancing, community relations, crisis prevention, multicultural infusion into the curriculum, compensatory education, race relations, staff development, and administrative procedures:; (3) historical data regarding district/community desegregations processes; (4) sources of pressure for district/community desegregation; and (5) remaining problems and areas of need. (Author/EB)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF WIEDS SURVEY

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for

PROJECT: WAYS TO IMPROVE EDUCATION IN DESEGREGATED SCHOOLS (WIEDS)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF WIEDS SURVEY

The WIEDS' survey instrument was designed to collect data in the following categories or goal areas: demographic data of school districts and survey respondents, successful desegregation strategies including those used by districts for (1) racial balancing, (2) community relations, (3) crisis prevention, (4) multicultural infusion into the curriculum, (5) compensatory education, (6) race relations, (7) staff development, (8) administrative procedures, historical data regarding a district and community's desegregation process, sources of pressure for a district and community to desegregate, and remaining problems and areas of need. The majority of the items on the instrument were closed-response and required a rating on a five-point scale.

Survey instruments were mailed to 262 school districts in the SEDL region selected according to four criteria: (1) district size, (2) location, (3) urban/rural status, and (4) presence of an ESAA grant during the 1977-1978 school year. Additionally, instruments were mailed to 36 staff members of Title IV General Assistance Centers in the SEDL region who had worked with districts selected for the project survey. One hundred thirty-one, or more than 63 percent of the districts surveyed, completed and returned the survey instrument. Sixteen of 36, or 44%, of the General Assistance Center personnel surveyed completed and mailed in the survey instrument.

The 131 participating districts vary greatly in geographic and demographic characteristics. The persons in each district's central office completing the survey form represented a wide range of backgrounds, but the majority were Anglo males over 40 years of age with more than six years' administrative experience in public education. Additionally, nearly all had at least one

year of classroom teaching experience and over half had more than six years' experience teaching. The WIEDS staff felt that the respondents' knowledge of their districts' desegregation efforts could be reliable.

According to these survey respondents, three-fourths of all districts surveyed had applied for and received ESAA funds during the 1977-78 school year. Twenty-nine percent of the respondents surveyed labeled their districts as being urban in nature. Fewer than 10 percent labeled their districts as suburban, while the majority (57%) indicated their districts were rural.

The analysis of the survey instrument responses was threefold. First, a tabulation of the frequency of use of each strategy and the mean rating for effectiveness as indicated by survey responses was conducted. Secondly, the top twenty strategies were identified by their mean effectiveness ratings. Finally, through the use of correlational statistics, the trends existing between district and respondent demographic characteristics, strategy use and effectiveness and existing problems/areas of need as indicated by respondents were identified.

The results of the WIEDS survey indicated that desegregated school systems can be more educationally effective than they were as segregated districts, i.e., they can provide improved race relations and an atmosphere more conducive to positive self-concept to more students, as well as a more equitable provision of materials and facilities. Survey respondents indicated that (1) the quality of the curriculum, (2) quality of education in general, and (3) attendance tends to increase after desegregation. There were indications, however, that certain issues could be addressed more effectively during and after the process of desegregation. Specifically, respondents felt that school discipline and parental involvement were issues which warranted considerable attention. Further, respondents felt that student achievement

was especially sensitive to changes which take place during and after desegregation, indicating that care be taken to ensure that the education of students should not be adversely affected.

The twenty most effective desegregation strategies, more or less in order of their effectiveness, according to the respondents were (1) minority participation in extracurricular activities, (2) upgrading educational facilities and equipment, (3) enlargement of counseling programs, (4) reduction of teacher/pupil ratios, (5) minority participation in student government, (6) communications skills training for teachers, (7) increased number of teacher aides, (8) increased student-faculty contact, (9) solicitation of ESAA funds, (10) hiring bilingual teachers, (11) using community liaison workers, (12) establishing vocational training programs, (13) using parental volunteers for school activities, (14) creating innovative extracurricular activities, (15) conducting human relations activities for students, (16) individualized instruction, (17) teaching effectiveness training, (18) leadership effectiveness training, (19) training teachers in the use of bilingual materials, and (20) minority student participation in accelerated classes.

Of the eight desegregation strategy categories or goal areas into which the strategies were categorized, only two, Category I (Establish Student and/or Faculty Racial Balancing) and Category II (Promote Community Involvement and/or Improve Communication with the Community) appeared to be presenting significant problems to the districts surveyed. Though strategies in these two categories were for the most part perceived to be effective, their overall effectiveness rating was noticeably lower than the effectiveness ratings of the other strategy categories. The relatively low ratings of these two areas probably are an indication of what the two single most important factors in the

desegregation process are: (1) the actual racial-ethnic composition of schools within a district, and (2) the acceptance and support of desegregation by the individual community involved.

Consistent with these findings were survey results which suggested that community conditions prior to desegregation such as the degree of civil rights activity and the public stance of community leaders before, during, and after the desegregation process can have a distinct impact on subsequent educational quality in a school district. In those communities surveyed, the respondents indicated that the support of religious leaders, political leaders, and school district officials were important predictors of the success of desegregation and the quality of subsequent educational services in the district.

It is important to note that these results indicate that the most important influencers of subsequent educational quality and the desegregation process as a whole are "locals" rather than "outsiders." Agencies and organizations which are not a part of the local community base did not, according to the survey respondents, have a significant impact on the educational quality ratings and the overall desegregation process. These results stress the need for systematic and effective communication between the desegregating district and community leadership.

The results of the survey instrument analysis also yielded valuable insight into the nature and effectiveness of staff development strategies in the desegregation process. According to the respondents, 62 percent of the staff development provided in the surveyed districts originated at the central office level, while 38 percent originated within the schools themselves. While it was expected that a large amount of the staff development originated at the central office level, the fact that 38 percent began at the building

level indicates that teachers and building administrators have a significant voice about the training they receive.

There is a significant difference in perceptions by central office and school staff in types of training needed. Central office personnel appear to be more concerned with the acceptance of desegregation and the support and training of school staff, where needed, for effective implementation of desegregation. School staff is concerned with classroom management, disciplinary techniques, and strategies effective in coping with the unique demand presented by multiethnic classrooms. Of the desegregation staff development strategies included in the survey instrument, "communications skills training" was rated as the most effective.

Because a major emphasis of the WIEDS project is upon identifying and presenting effective desegregation strategies to school districts, the WIEDS instrument also surveyed the effectiveness of the different modes of staff development presentations. Of the methods to conduct staff development, those involving personal and group interaction appear to be most popular and are perceived to be more effective than staff development methods which rely upon the presentation of materials. Possibly this could be due to the less restrictive nature of individual and group discussion which allows the issues to be personalized, whereas the content of materials-oriented training is often tied to the specifics of the presentation, which are many times unlike the problems and issues faced by many teachers in the classroom.

The questionnaires provided 55 responses indicating unmet needs in the school districts represented. Most, 29, of these cited a need for ethnic/cultural awareness activities in their schools. Some examples are: "There remains too much mistrust among the races; need greater appreciation and

understanding"; "schools are desegregated racially but there has been little or no movement toward genuine racial integration." Seven (7) others cited a need for human relations training; for example: "A good human relations program should be implemented"; and "there is a continuing need for improving self-concept...." There were also seven (7) instances of need for more parental/community involvement, such as: "Difficulty in getting parent involvement in school activities and organizations"; and "We need more community liaison, particularly with parents of underachieving students."

Four (4) other needs cited involved additional desegregation (two for staff and two for students). Only two (2) indicated any need for more funds for desegregation. Four (4) noted academic problems, and three of these were related to other needs, principally ethnic awareness, as in "motivation of black and brown students to excel as the students did before [desegregation]." The two (2) responses citing resegregation problems, such as: "Our biggest problem is...'white flight' to our neighboring school districts who have not desegregated," are also related to ethnic awareness.